



## Getting Local Government Back on Track



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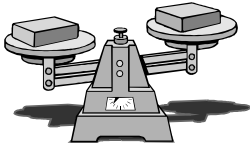
Adapted by UF/IFAS from:  
*Disaster Handbook for  
Extension Agents*  
(Wisconsin Cooperative  
Extension Service)

### Meeting Operational Challenges after a Disaster

When disaster strikes a community, government leaders are under intense pressure to stay on top of recovery issues. Residents, businesses, government units and the media want answers and direction, even if emergency government has taken the reigns on emergency response efforts. If local leaders are among those affected by the disaster, getting government back on track can be especially difficult. Use of all available expertise and resources can ease the situation.

### General Guidelines

- Recognize that there is often a delicate balance between emergency government and local government. While emergency government has statutory authority for response efforts after a disaster, disagreements and resentments can occur unless there is cooperation, trust and ongoing communication between local and emergency officials. This is also true during the recovery phase, when the community has ultimate authority but other agencies are still involved.
- Discuss your community's recovery needs with state and U.S. representatives. They can be a great asset in obtaining disaster assistance on the state and national levels. Recognize that you may be competing with other communities across the nation for assistance.
- Take advantage of all available expertise and resources. Your community will need help on a continuing basis for a long time after a disaster. Cooperative Extension specialists in the area of community resources can often help local leaders see the “big picture,” find their way through the government maze, and utilize every available resource. These resources may include:
  - local emergency government
  - Cooperative Extension Agents, including county agents



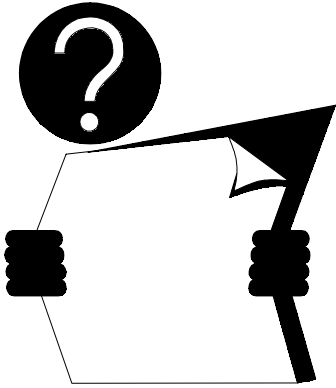
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- and specialists from throughout the state
- state agencies, such as the Department of Natural Resources or the Department of Transportation
- the National Guard
- the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, churches and volunteer groups
- regional planning commissions
- temporary employees. Limited-term employees can be of great help to communities in the months following a disaster. Funding is often available through state or federal disaster relief agencies.

- Balance the pressure to speed recovery with the need for planning and new growth within a community. Getting local government back on track may mean new efforts to:
  - Provide business counseling to local merchants that have sustained damage. The rebuilding period is an excellent time to re-evaluate business and make necessary improvements or changes in focus. Economic recovery can go hand-in-hand with disaster recovery.
  - Consider land-use and zoning changes that are long overdue.
  - Address aesthetic issues as businesses and residents begin rebuilding. These may cover architectural styles, colors, textures, size and height restrictions and signage.
- Don't ignore your own needs. It's critical to balance public duty and personal life—especially if your home and family have been affected by the disaster. It's not uncommon for leaders to spend all their time coordinating disaster efforts only to resign shortly afterward because they neglected their own concerns.

## Working with the Public

Community meetings can be an excellent way to get everyone moving in the same direction. However, it's better to hold meetings after the emergency response phase has passed and the community is out of danger. That way people can more calmly focus on recovery, clean-up efforts and their future. During the emergency phase, people need basic information about shelter, medical assistance, food and disaster relief. Radio and television announcements and relief workers can usually do the job most efficiently.



Drop-in centers for information on disaster relief are another good idea. Communities can use a municipal building, school, library or other public building to dispense information on everything from temporary housing to disaster loans. Relief agency representatives can be available for residents daily or weekly. Local officials should also be available on a regular basis to meet with residents.

### Additional resources

- Your local emergency government office
- Your county community resource and development agent
- The American Red Cross
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)